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±NEWHOUSE NEWS SERVICE±

WASHINGTON - PART OF THE ENDURING MYTHOLOGY OF AMERICA IS THAT THE NATION HAS SATELLITES SOPHISTICATED ENOUGH TO DETERMINE THE SEX OF A RABBIT FROM 150 MILES IN SPACE.

THE GOVERNMENT PUBLIC RELATIONS APPARATUS WOULD HAVE AMERICANS BELIEVE THAT WHEN THE RUSSIANS SNEEZE, THE UNITED STATES KNOWS IT.

SUCH EXTRAVAGANT CLAIMS ASIDE, THE UNITED STATES HAS AN ENORMOUSLY EXPENSIVE AND SOPHISTICATED NETWORK FOR MONITORING ACTIVITIES IN THE SOVIET UNION AND THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

THIS IS THE BASIS FOR PRESIDENT CARTER'S CLAIMS THAT IF THE RUSSIANS CHEAT ON THE NEW NUCLEAR ARMS AGREEMENT, HE WILL KNOW IT.

BUT IN FACT, "VERIFYING" SOVIET COMPLIANCE WITH ALL THE PROVISIONS OF THE PROPOSED TREATY WILL BE A POLICY JUDGMENT BASED ON AN ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET INTENTIONS AS WELL AS CAPABILITIES.

THE PICTURES AND TELEMENTRY STOLEN FROM THE ATMOSPHERE - THE MONITORING - CAN TELL ONLY PART OF THE STORY.

THIS WILL BE THE CASE WITH THE SALT II TREATY WHICH CARTER IS ABOUT TO SIGN WITH THE SOVIET UNION. IT HAS BEEN THE CASE WITH ALL PREVIOUS STRATEGIC ARMS AGREEMENTS.

BECAUSE THIS NEW AGREEMENT ATTEMPTS FOR THE FIRST TIME TO LIMIT THE QUALITY AS WELL AS THE QUANTITY OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS, THE CREDIBILITY OF THE U.S. VERIFICATION SCHEME HAS COME INCREASINGLY UNDER QUESTION.

AND BECAUSE THE MONITORING SYSTEM AND ITS CAPABILITIES ARE AMONG THE NATION'S MOST TIGHTLY HELD SECRETS, IT IS DIFFICULT FOR CARTER TO DEFEND THE VERIFICATION SYSTEM BEYOND SAYING, "TRUST ME."

THE WHITE HOUSE'S ZEAL IN KNOCKING DOWN ANY CHALLENGES TO THE VERIFICATION SYSTEM RAISED BY OPPONENTS OF THE TREATY HAS ONLY ADDED CONFUSION TO THE DEBATE SO FAR.

ADM. STANFIELD TURNER, THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE, GOT HIMSELF IN TROUBLE WITH WHITE HOUSE SALT-SELLERS RECENTLY WHEN HE TOLD A GROUP OF REPORTERS THAT THE CIA WOULD ASSESS THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY'S ABILITY TO MONITOR SOVIET TESTS AND MISSILE DEPLOYMENT BUT WOULD MAKE NO OVERALL JUDGMENT ON THE VERIFIABILITY OF THE TREATY.

CRITICS SEIZED ON THIS AS EVIDENCE THAT THE NATION'S INTELLIGENCE CHIEF HAD MISGIVINGS ABOUT THE SYSTEM.

ACTUALLY, TURNER WAS JUST BEING CANDID.

UNDER PRESSURE OF THE ATTACKS, ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN FORCED TO LIFT SLIGHTLY THE SHROUD OF SECRECY SURROUNDING THE SYSTEM. IN BROAD TERMS, IT WORKS LIKE THIS:

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PICTURES AND DATA COLLECTED FROM SATELLITES; SPY PLANES AND LAND-BASED AND SEABORNE LISTENING STATIONS ARE FUNNELED THROUGH THE NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY; WHICH OVERSEES THE SUPER-SECRET MONITORING SYSTEM; AND INTO THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY.

THE CIA'S EXPERTS ANALYZE THE DATA AND REPORT THEIR FINDINGS TO A SPECIAL INTER-AGENCY COMMITTEE WHICH WORKS UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI; CARTER'S CHIEF NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER.

THE CIA MAY SAY; FOR INSTANCE; THAT HE KNOW WITH AN ACCURACY OF PLUS OR MINUS 10 PERCENT THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE NOT EXCEEDED THE LIMIT ON THE NUMBER OF WARHEADS THEY CAN PLACE ON THEIR MISSILES.

BRZEZINSKI'S GROUP; CALLED THE SPECIAL COORDINATION COMMITTEE AND COMPRISED OF EXPERTS FROM THE DEFENSE DEPARTMENT; STATE DEPARTMENT; CIA; JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF AND THE ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT AGENCY; WOULD THEN MAKE A JUDGMENT ON WHETHER THIS IS ADEQUATE ASSURANCE THAT THE RUSSIANS ARE NOT CHEATING IN A SIGNIFICANT WAY.

IF THIS FALLS WITHIN THE TOLERABLE LIMITS; IT WOULD MEAN THIS PARTICULAR LIMIT IS "ADEQUATELY VERIFIABLE." THE BOTTOM LINE OF THIS CONTINUOUS PROCESS OF MONITORING AND ANALYZING IS TO MAKE SURE THAT EVEN IF THE RUSSIANS FUDGE A BIT; THEY WILL NOT BE ABOUT TO CHEAT SIGNIFICANTLY ENOUGH TO MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE.

THIS IS TO SAY; THEIR CHEATING WILL NOT AFFECT THE STRATEGIC BALANCE. THE UNITED STATES STILL WOULD BE ABLE TO ANNIHILATE RUSSIANS EVEN AS THEY ARE ANNIHILATING AMERICANS.

OTHER SAFEGUARDS ALSO ARE BUILT INTO THE SYSTEM.

THE SOVIETS HAVE PLEDGED NOT TO INTERFERE WITH THE MONITORING OR TO ENCODE THE TELEMETRY SENT DURING THEIR MISSILE TESTS. THERE ALSO IS A STANDING SOVIET-AMERICAN CONSULTIVE GROUP WHICH CAN FURNISH MORE INFORMATION WHEN SERIOUS QUESTIONS OF CHEATING ARISE.

MOST IMPORTANT; THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION CONTENDS THAT ONLY LIMITS THAT ARE WITHIN CURRENT U.S. MONITORING CAPABILITIES ARE INCLUDED IN THE PROPOSED TREATY.

FUELING THE DEBATE ARE THE COMPLEXITY OF THE PROPOSED TREATY AND THE DAMAGE DONE TO THE NATION'S MONITORING SYSTEM BY THE LOSS OF TWO KEY LISTENING POSTS IN IRAN WHICH HAD KEPT WATCH ON THE SOVIET'S MAIN MISSILE TESTING SITES.

THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION CLAIMS IT CAN COMPENSATE FOR THE LOSS OF THESE SITES THROUGH OTHER MEANS - WITHOUT SAYING WHAT THEY ARE.

CARTER ADDRESSED THE PROBLEM OF VERIFICATION AT HIS NEWS CONFERENCE MONDAY.

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"WE CAN'T GUARANTEE THAT EVERY TIME A TEST MISSILE IS LAUNCHED BY THE SOVIET UNION, THAT EVERY ASPECT OF THAT FLIGHT CAN BE COMPLETELY COMPREHENDED BY US," HE SAID.

"THERE ARE LIMITS ON WHAT WE CAN DO. BUT...IN ORDER FOR THE SOVIETS TO DEVELOP ANY KIND OF SIGNIFICANT NEW MISSILE, THEY WOULD HAVE TO HAVE LIKE 20 TO 50 TEST LAUNCHINGS. AND DURING THAT PROCESS IT IS A VERY GOOD LIKELIHOOD THAT WE OURSELVES WOULD BE ABLE TO DETECT ANY VIOLATION OF THE SALT TREATY."

PERHAPS CARTER'S MOST COMPELLING ARGUMENT FOR THE TREATY IS THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE NO INCENTIVE TO NEGOTIATE AN AGREEMENT AND THEN VIOLATE IT. THIS COULD ONLY LEAD TO A DETERIORATION OF THE WHOLE PATTERN OF IMPROVING RELATIONS.

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